

La Veta Juvies

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“Innocence lost?”

Can we truly lose something we never had? Can an abused child lose their innocence? My answer to this question would be no. How can a child lose something they never had? How can a teen-ager for that matter, lose their innocence when they never had a chance to be an innocent child?

The inspiration for this book lies in my heart, my memories of my friends and how much we all wanted so badly to be innocent and the hard fact was that we all knew it was impossible to be something we were not.

Most of my friends growing up had been brought up in the same types of homes as mine, abusive and dysfunctional in every way.

We were often out on the streets, running around the neighborhood like a “gang” and even had our own official name, the La Veta Juvies.

I am absolutely positive that if any of the old La Veta Juvies see this book they will know it is about us.

I have changed the names of my friends and myself and this story is our story. Like my life now, I hope that their lives have been filled with peace and goodness. I wish them all the best and thank them for being my friends at a time when I needed them so badly.

Without them, I don't know if I would still be here today, as they showed me unconditional love and care, protection and kindness and were there for me when my own family was not.

They provided the love that my own family could not show. The La Veta Juvies were my family and still are to this day.

Love and Peace to all who read this book.

In gratitude and eternal thankfulness to Donna Kshir, Author, friend, Advocate who believed in my writing, encouraged me to keep writing, helped me put this book together in the original version, spent countless hours with me on the telephone helping me get through some very tough times while writing my memoirs. Donna touched my heart for eternity, as she does with everyone who has the luxury of meeting her.

Chapter One

“Shhhh....keep your head down”, the grass was damp and cold and I was laying facedown as motionless and still as I could. Search lights from the police car beamed over our heads. I did not breathe as the cruiser was at a crawl; the searchlights moved slowly passed us.

I could hear my heart pounding in my chest. Jo and I laid there for a few minutes to make sure the police car was far enough up the street before jumping to our feet and bolting down the street...”HAHAHA” we laughed...looking back to make sure there were no other police cars in the area.

Just minutes before, Jo and I had been hanging out on the block, it was pitch black, and all was quiet when we saw a police car cruising the neighborhood headed right for us when Jo whistled as loud as she could and then proceeded to flip the officer the bird... we ran hard as the police car did a u-turn in the middle of the small intersection, we made our way to the next street and found a yard with uncut grass and jumped face down, hoping we would not be caught.

We had done it! “YAH!!” “WE ARE THE LA VETA JUVIES!!” We shouted and yelled at the top of our lungs hoping to wake up the neighborhood. La Veta was the name of the street I lived on. Jo and I walked casually up the street back to my place.

“You goin’ home?” she asked. “yah, gonna head in I guess”
“I’ll walk you to the end of the block” I said as we made our way
up the deserted street.

The only light was a streetlight at the end of the block. “You
okay to walk the rest of the way home?” I asked. Jo said she
was fine, and “they” better stay clear of her, or she would “kick
their ass”, meaning anyone who happened to come along to
bother her. Jo lived two blocks up and we parted ways. I made
my way back down the street. It was two o’clock in the morning
and I wondered what I would be walking into when I got home.

No one would notice as I closed my bedroom door and turned
on the light. Taking my “freak” jacket off and kicking my shoes
in the corner, I turned my stereo on and layed down on the
bed, rolled over and fell asleep.

Chapter Two

I woke with a start. Sat upright, looking to see what time it was. It was four o'clock in the morning and I had only been asleep for two hours. My dad had come in my room and was tearing down my posters. I sat there watching him rip them off the wall. "DEVIL MUSIC" "DEVIL WORSHIPPERS" he yelled as he ripped them up and threw them on the carpet. I started to say something when I used my better judgment and let him continue on. I muttered under my breath, "they are not devil worshippers, it's just music."

He turned and looked at me, eyes blazing with anger and hatred and I knew I better not say anything else as it would not be in my best interest. "YOU are what is wrong with this family, YOU are the cause of this family's problems. You are evil and of the devil himself."

I remained silent and sat motionless on the bed, trying to control my mouth. I knew what would happen if I argued back so I took it, waiting until he had his say and left my room closing the door as he went out. I fought back the anger and muttered under my breath again, "crazy asshole," got up, turned off the light and staggered back to bed.

Ten o'clock in the morning came around quick. I turned over and looked at my posters ripped to shreds on my bedroom

carpet, “oh well, just another day” I thought as I got up and made my way to the bathroom.

Passing by the kitchen I could see my mom sitting in her chair at the kitchen table, book in hand and cigarette burning away in the ashtray. All was quiet and the only noise in the house was the air conditioner. It was hot and it was only 10am. I had a quick shower and went into the kitchen to grab some breakfast.

“How are you?” I said to my mom who did not look up from her book, “fine” she said, with a smile, taking a drag off of her cigarette. “Need anything done today?” I asked, hoping she would say no. “No” she said, continuing to read her book.

My mom loved to read, and she read as many books as she could get her hands on. It was her only escape. She could go anywhere, and be anyone as she read those romance novels where the characters were from ancient times, kings and queens and damsels in distress, or southern belles with southern gentlemen coming to call on her, charming and polite men who knew all the right words to say to a lady.

I grabbed my bowl of cereal and went into the living room, sitting down on the sofa. My dad came into the living room and glared at me as he went by. How dare he come into my room and ruin all my posters. I liked those posters and they were not evil or devil worshipping bands.

I avoided his gaze and continued eating my cereal. He went out the front door to water the lawn and I finished my cereal and headed out to find my friends. It was Saturday morning and I thought about how much I loved summer!

Chapter Three

I walked down the block, smiling as I saw my friends sitting on the sidewalk. “HEY, WHAT’S UP?” Jo was there as well as Chris and the usual crowd, my two friends who lived across the street from me, Mitch and Ellen.

We all decided to go and look for some weed. None of us had any and we all wanted to get high. Chris and Mitch took off on their bikes to go and look for some pot, and the rest of us hung around, talking about what we were going to do that night.

“Hey Steph, did you get in shit for coming in late?” Jo asked me. “No, but my dad ripped down my posters last night” I said. “That’s the shits” Jo responded. “What a jerk” Ellen added. “Yeah, it sucks” I said, watching Chris and Mitch riding up on their bikes. “SCORE” they yelled, jumping off their bikes, we all headed to Mitch’s backyard to light up.

We walked around the side gate to the backyard. Mitch’s mom was at work and his dad would not be home because he had been murdered years before. Two teen-agers stabbed him to death as he chased after them down the alley. They were attempting to steal two ten speed bicycles from the backyard, and Mitch’s dad yelled at them and ran after them as they rode down the alley.

They got off the bikes and stabbed him in the neck multiple times and took off. He managed to crawl out of the alley to the street where he died. My sister and her friend happened to be driving by just after he crawled out on his hands and knees and lay in a pool of his own blood on the street.

They phoned the ambulance and police but it was too late. He was pronounced dead on the scene. I remember, I was over playing at Mitch's house that day those years before when it happened. My mom had called me home to tell me to watch Mitch and his younger brother because there had been an accident and Mitch's mom was going to have to go to the hospital with their father.

I knew he had been stabbed but did not tell the boys as I baby sat them. I tried to reassure them that it would be okay and their mom would be back. Mitch and I had a special bond because of that and we used to hang out a lot as children.

"What's the plan for tonight?" I asked, passing the joint to Jo. "Nothin', just hanging out" was the general consensus. Just then we heard glass shattering somewhere on the street. It sounded like a car window had been shattered, we all bolted out the side yard gate and onto the street to see our friend John running up to us with a bat in his hand.

“Some dudes just busted that car window” John said. We all looked at him and the bat and said “what??” “You are the one with the bat in your hand”. “It wasn’t me dudes, no way. I was just coming over to see if you all want to hit some balls, I did not break that window. Some dudes in a car did it” he tried to convince us.

We all took his side when the neighbors phoned the police and they questioned us about the incident. We told them that John was with us the whole time and we were playing baseball in the backyard when we heard the glass shatter and ran out to see what happened.

John had a record, and was on probation for minor offences. His mom did not care about him, or his dad for that matter. They were divorced and had their own “agendas” and did not care what happened to their sons.

After the policemen made their report, we all went back to Mitch’s and rolled some more dubes and hung out. This was looking like a decent summer after all.

Chapter Four

I walked up the driveway to go home later that evening. I went into the kitchen to scope out some supper, noticing a pot of chicken and dumplings on the stove. I heated some up and noticed my mom was lying down in her makeshift bedroom, a tiny room that could have been used as a storage room or small dining room.

“Are you okay?” I asked her, speaking softly. She did not answer. She was like this lately, either sleeping, reading at the kitchen table or yelling and screeching at me for no apparent reason.

On the bad days or nights she would throw in a slap, a backhand or a beating for good measure. My parents had never gotten along since before I was born and their marital problems were just getting worse.

I took my soup into the living room. Turning on the television I sat down and started to get into a show. I heard a knock at the door, and as I opened the front door a string of fire crackers went off. BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG!!

I was surprised and laughing but my mom who had been lying down was not so happy about it. She came charging out into the living room shouting, “DAMN kids!” “GO HOME!” “ROTTEN

KIDS”!! She shouted, I went out into the front yard to tell them all we better leave my place and go somewhere else.

My mom slammed the door behind me. “You guys suck” I said. “Sorry Steph” Jo laughed, Mitch and the gang laughed. “Your mom is PISSED OFF” Mitch said. “Yes, you guys SUCK!” I said it again, laughing with them. We all took off to go and roam the neighborhood.

“You’re in for it tonight” Jo said as we walked side by side up the street. “I don’t care” I replied. “They don’t need a reason to kick my ass; doesn’t matter to me” I said. We all went and hung out at the park two blocks away. It was a hot summer night and I was glad to have my friends.

Later that night we all headed home. Jo offered to let me stay at her house if I wanted to, I had spent quite a few nights on their couch this last year. “No, it’s okay man” I said walking up my driveway. “See you tomorrow” Jo said.

I opened the door and went in the house. My mom was waiting up in the kitchen. “I want to talk to you” she said to me as I was going in my bedroom, I turned around and went into the kitchen. “Your friends are trouble makers and especially that Jo” she said with a tone of anger in her voice. “Jo is cool” I replied. “I don’t care WHAT YOU THINK YOU STUPID PIECE OF SHIT!!” her tone changing from mild anger to full on anger. “I

DON'T want you hanging around with her, she's a slut and a whore and so are YOU!" she started to yell.

I knew I was in for it, so I stood up for my friend knowing that I was going to be in trouble either way. "She IS NOT a slut!" "I am NOT a slut!" I said loudly back to her. I was standing in the doorway as that was always the safest place to be in any room with my mom.

I started to back up and out of the kitchen when she stood up and threw her cup of cold coffee at me, cup and all. "I KNEW YOU WERE GOING TO CAUSE ME GRIEF!!" she shouted.

I had ducked but could not get out of the way of the cup or the coffee and was now waiting to see how this was going to unfold. "YOU PIECE OF SHIT" she screamed at me, "ALL YOU KIDS, JUST CAUSE ME MORE PROBLEMS AND MORE GRIEF! YOU CAN SEE HOW SICK I AM AND WITH THE WAY YOUR FATHER ACTS AROUND ME AND TRYING TO FORCE HIMSELF ON ME, I CAN'T GET ANY HELP HERE, AND NOW YOU THINK YOU ARE GOING TO START YOUR SHIT WITH ME???" she continued to scream.

I did not answer her, and decided I would be better off to not say a word, "maybe she will let this one go tonight" I thought to myself. "NOT ANOTHER WORD" she glared at me, "NOT ANOTHER WORD OUT OF YOUR GOD DAMN MOUTH OR I WILL

KNOCK YOU IN TO TOMORROW”, I could feel my body tense up and my asshole slam shut.

I remembered the beating I had taken from her a year and a half before that could have killed me. I did not say another word and turned and went to my room, careful not to slam the door and sat on the bed. “What did I do?” I knew I was not a bad kid, I knew I was not a slut, and for her to call my best friend that name really hurt me.

My friend had it tough at home as well, and she was doing the best she could. Jo was good to me and I cared about her very much. No tears came to my eyes. Those tears were all cried out years before. I just sat on the bed hating myself, hating my life and hating my mom.

Chapter Five

Sitting on the trunk of my dad's car in the driveway I watched across the street. Jo ran over to me and whispered, "we are going to go into Ellen's house. No one is home and I know where her mom and dad's stash is". "I don't want any part of this" I told Jo. "Not me, don't include me in this".

"My parents will kill me for sure if I get busted, so I'm out of this" Jo looked across the street at Mitch and a few of the other kids we hung around with. "We don't care man! We are going to go in through the window and we are not going to mess with anything, just going to grab the weed and that is it", she said trying to solicit support.

"I am not going with you" I said firmly. Jo started to walk back across the street, looking back at me said "can you keep a lookout to see if they are coming home? And if they do will you come and alert us if you see their car?" she asked. "I'll keep a watch out, but I'm not involved in this" I said.

A few minutes later they all came running out from the back yard. Jo was carrying a duffle bag and handed it to me. "You have to stash this for me okay?" I looked in the bag, a bottle of Tequila, cash, cassette tapes and jewelry. "I don't want to keep this at my house!" I said, "man, you know what will happen if

my mom finds this shit!!” “She won’t find it” Jo said “come on!!”

We went into my bedroom and stashed the duffle bag and went back out to go get high. “Think anyone saw us?” Jo asked as we sat at the park smoking the joint. “I don’t think so.” I said passing the joint to John. “Her parents suck” Mitch said. I agreed.

Ellen lived across the street from me since I was born and we did not like her parents. They were very strict with their children and did not like us. They were always throwing me hateful looks as they knew how my parents were, had seen the cop cars, ambulances and law enforcement officials coming to our house for years. They heard my parents screaming at each other, and screaming at us regularly and did not like our family.

“My mom told me she did not want me hanging out with you” I told Jo. “FUCK HER” she said, “remember the time she kicked me out of your house when she was kicking your ass and I told her to stop hitting you?”

I remembered that Jo had told my mom that there were laws against child abuse and my mom made her leave our house. “Your parents SUCK!!” she said, passing the joint to me. I took a drag and held it in, looking at her, “yeah, that’s a fact!” I said, laughing and brushing it off.

Chapter Six

A few days went by, and I did not think about that duffle bag with the bottle of Tequila and stolen property that was stashed in my bedroom for safe-keeping. Jo and I met on the street, “go get the bag” she said. “Yeah, I’ll go get it” I went back into my house and went into my bedroom. Closing the door, I went to the clothes closet and peered in to the back of the closet where the duffle bag had been stashed and it was not there.

I panicked, “oh shit”, “did my mom find it?” I thought to myself, this is not going to be good. I went back out onto the street and told Jo that the duffle bag was gone. “What?” she said. “NO WAY! What happened? Did your mom find it??” she asked. “I don’t know. She hasn’t said anything about it so I don’t know but if she did she will KICK MY ASS!!” “just tell her you found it” Jo replied. “That sucks man! All that for nothing” she added.

Mitch and Chris came running up to us. It was early in the day and we had all day to hang out. “WE got some Cid” they said. “DOUBLE DIPPED!! SNOWFLAKE ACID!!” Chris added. I had been using drugs for years and had done some hallucinogens before, but not this type of acid and not “double dipped”. We were all in. We went to Mitch’s house because his mom was at work and not going to be home until later that evening.

We all dropped the acid and not too long after started to feel

the effects. It was not long before Jo started to have a bad trip. She was staring into a mirror looking at herself and freaking out. "It's not me!" she kept saying over and over. "It's a lie! ALL OF THIS IS JUST A LIE" she kept saying over and over again. I was experiencing my own "trip" and thought I better see if I could calm her down.

Chris and Mitch were freaking out on everything in the living room. Common household items suddenly became very interesting as they changed shapes and moved on their own. "Jo is having a bad trip" Chris said, laughing his head off. "I know man!!" "Just leave her alone" was my advice as she was not listening to me as I had been trying to talk to her and make sure she was okay.

This went on all afternoon, and it was not looking like we were going to be coming down any time soon. I don't remember going home but at some point I must have gone home because I woke up the next day and went into the kitchen, still "tripping" and hallucinating.

I got the cereal out of the cupboard and the bowl. Poured the cereal into the bowl, went to fridge to get the milk and put the milk on my cereal. My mom was sitting at her place at the kitchen table. She did not look up at me and so far I figured I had it all under control. I concluded that I must not appear to be on drugs and as long as I could keep it up I should be able to

pull this off. I put the milk in the cupboard and the cereal in the refrigerator.

My mom said nothing. I said “Hi mom” and went into the living room to try to remain in control. I was still “tripping” and this was day two. Three days went by before I started to come down. My friends were all okay and Jo was fine. We all met up at Mitch’s house and laughed about that acid trip. “Three DAYS!” Jo laughed.” I was flying for THREE days!!”, “Me too!” I replied, and Mitch and Chris said the same thing.

I did not like that experience, and was thankful that my friend Jo was okay. I had seen what drugs will do to a person as my older brother was a drug addict and had to leave the country because he was on the lam from the FBI and other law enforcement. They told him if he did not leave the country he would be sent to prison so my parents bought him a one way plane ticket to Canada. He had left the year before and had been on drugs since he was a young boy.

After seeing him nearly die from numerous overdoses, I knew what drugs could do to people, and yet I used them myself to escape. Escape the reality of the abuse I was suffering at home. Escape the reality of my parent’s inability to love each other, to love us, their children, and their failure to care about any of us.

They only cared about their own needs, and their own emotions. We were not allowed to have any emotions or feelings and had been battered and abused for so long. The only way I could cope was to escape. Just as my mom read her novels to escape. I chose drugs as an escape and my view of myself and my childhood ate at me constantly.

I felt worthless. I felt unloved. I felt evil and bad. All the things my parents told me over the years had finally made their mark. They literally pounded into me how much they did not want me or love me. I took drugs because in my own mind, it was the only way I could survive in that home.

Chapter Seven

John walked up to where we were all sitting. He had a fresh red welt on his face and tears in his eyes. "What happened?" I asked him as he sat down on the curb. "My mom hit me, threw me out of the house" he said looking at us with a look of embarrassment and a half grin. "That sucks man!" Jo said. "Yeah, it does suck" I added. "She was pissed off because she said my bro and me are not helping her around the house" "We try" he added. "That is just not right" I added.

"It's not right what your mom and dad do to you either" Jo said looking at me. "It's my life" I said, looking down at the pavement. "It's bullshit" Jo stood up. "What do you guys want to do?" John asked if he could use my phone. He needed to call his dad and ask him if he could stay with him for awhile. I told him he could use our phone.

Both my parents were at work, so we all went into the kitchen while John phoned his dad. Shortly after my dad came home from work and walked into the kitchen, seeing us all sitting there he pointed to the front door. "OUT!! All of YOU! OUT NOW!" he said motioning to the front door.

My friends stood up looking at me and then started to head out to the living room. "John is just using the phone" I said, "He can get off the phone right now and get OUT!" my dad said

loudly, as he came around the kitchen table I was backing up against the sideboard. “What? He is just using the phone!” I said, half flinching already and he had not even reached me yet.

He grabbed my arm, squeezing it hard and pushed me up hard against the cabinets, “Those PUNKS are not allowed in our home” he said threateningly. “Okay.” I winced as he was hurting my arm, squeezing harder until I cried out.

I thought for sure he was going to beat me up but he let go of my arm and walked out of the kitchen. I joined Jo and the gang outside in the front yard. “Your dad is a jerk” Jo said. We all agreed and headed off to the park. After hanging around for a while, John decided to go to his dad’s place and left us. We all headed home for the night. Jo invited me to her house.

Her mom was an Officer in the Sheriff’s Department. She was a “real” Sheriff, which I thought was so cool. I liked Jo’s mom and thought she was cool. She was a good mom, but had never been able to pick the right type of men to have in her life.

She was divorced from Jo’s dad who was an abusive alcoholic. Jo had told me about some of the things that would happen when she was growing up and how her dad had beaten up her mother and sent her to the hospital a few times, and how he had beaten her and her younger sister with a belt many times in a drunken rage.

I liked her mom but she sure did not know how to pick her boyfriends. One bad relationship after another was not enough to sink in that she should not allow herself or her children to be abused.

She was now dating a guy who had just gotten out of prison. He was often at Jo's house and seemed okay, but I did not trust him for a minute. I did not trust any adults but especially ex cons.

Chapter Eight

I did not want to go home that night. The last two weeks had been bad and it just seemed to be getting worse. “Can I sleep on your couch tonight Jo?” I asked. “Sure man, you know where the blankets are if you get cold” Her mom agreed that I could stay the night.

I did not call my mom. She would have been so bent out of shape as she had told me not to hang around with Jo anymore and if she knew I was staying the night at Jo’s she would have killed me.

She would not care if I came home anyway, as she had been threatening to put me in foster care for the last 3 years. I had a plan. I would wake up early and get home before she woke up, this way she would not know I had not been asleep in my bedroom all night.

Sometime after midnight I curled my legs up on the loveseat and drifted off. The next morning Jo’s mom was getting ready for work. I could smell the coffee brewing in the kitchen and sat up, stretching my legs out for a minute. Jo’s mom was in the shower and Jo and her sister Melanie were sound asleep. I headed out the door to walk home.

It was a quiet summer morning. No traffic on the streets yet, and the light from the morning sun was just starting to break

over the horizon. I loved this time of the morning, the cool air felt good. As soon as the sun did come around it would be replaced by stifling heat. The temperatures in New Mexico this time of year averaged 105, hot enough to melt the asphalt on the streets. I made my way up my driveway, and quietly opened the screen door, then the front door.

As I closed the door behind me, I tip toed to my bedroom just off of the living room and closed the door. I had made it, no one was up and I decided to try and get a few more hours of sleep and make it look good. I don't know why I was concerned as my parents did not come and check on me in the middle of the night.

My parents did not come into my room at bedtime and tell me they loved me, or say goodnight. They had never done that, but my dad was famous for coming in my room in the middle of the night to do things like he had done a few weeks before, like tearing up my posters and calling me names.

I wondered if he was really all there when he did those things, or if he was having one of his psychotic episodes as most of the times when he was behaving strange like that was in the middle of the night.

My dad was quite often screaming and shouting in his bedroom at the devil or the demons that were attacking him. I

had listened to that my whole life. It used to scare me, but now I knew it was just his own problem and the only thing that bothered me was that one day he could snap and kill us all in the middle of the night as he quite often threatened to do. "Oh well," I thought to myself, rolling over and stretching my legs out, "if they know I did not come home what does it matter?"

"They don't care anyway and what are they going to do, beat me?" I thought, "kill me?" "doesn't matter. Let them kill me, I don't care." I drifted off to sleep.

Chapter Nine

I woke up after a couple of hours and turned over to look at the clock. I came out into the living room wondering if my mom would say anything to me about not coming home. She did not need a reason to come down hard on me. I said hi to her as I walked to the bathroom. She did not acknowledge me or even look up as I went to have a shower. I was relieved.

Heading outside I could see Mitch and Ellen and Jo hanging out in front of Mitch's place. Ellen was telling them how someone had broken into their home and stolen a few things from her parents.

She was asking them if they had seen anyone hanging around that looked suspicious. Mitch and Jo just sat there cool and calm and looking at her as if they were surprised by the whole thing. I told her that I had not seen anything. We all hung out for the afternoon and ended up running around chasing each other and pretending we were mercenaries running through the neighbors backyards, jumping fences, walking on walls and finally ended up in my backyard.

Mitch picked up a cane from a "Spanish Broom" bush that was growing in our yard. That sucker was 4 feet long and solid. He was swinging it at me and hitting my knees with it.

I was wearing shorts and each time it hit my knees I was swearing at him. "Give me that!" "Stop hitting me" "Ouch" and I was laughing but it hurt like hell. He thought the whole thing was funny and Jo and Ellen were laughing their heads off. I continued to try to grab it from him before he could hit me with it again and I finally grabbed it out of his hands and started to chase him with it through the side yard.

"YOU ARE IN FOR IT NOW" I was yelling at him, laughing and running, swinging the cane at him when my dad appeared around the side of the house. He had just gotten off work and saw me chasing Mitch with the cane. My dad walked up to me forcefully and I immediately started backing up.

He yelled at me "Stop RIGHT NOW!" he said as he grabbed the cane from my hands and with one shove knocked me to the ground, up against the side of the house. "OH SHIT" I said as I could see him raise that cane up behind him and whip it down on my legs. "AAAAAAWWWWWW" I screamed out in pain. The pain was excruciating and no sooner had he hit my legs, he brought the cane down again as hard as he could. I was jerking uncontrollably and could not even control the muscles in my face or lips as he hit my legs again and again.

I was up against the house and my shoulder was scraping against the rough stucco that was scratching my skin. WHACK! WHACK! WHACK! The cane came down on my legs. My mouth

was frozen and I could not let out a sound as I could not breathe and felt as if my heart had stopped beating.

When he felt he had done his job and inflicted enough pain he took the cane and broke it over his knee. He threw it to the ground and walked off to go inside the house. I just laid there.

I knew my friends had taken off, they were now across the street looking over at me, wondering if they should come and help me up or if they should just give me a minute and leave me alone. I laid there, in shock and agony. I finally managed to sit up. “FFFFFUUUUCCCKKK” the word came out of my mouth. I was in so much pain and could not see due to the tears that were pouring out of my eyes.

Sitting up I slowly got up off the ground and was so humiliated. Here I was half way to 16 years old and my dad was still kicking my ass outside in plain view of the neighbors. Mitch and Ellen were used to seeing these episodes as they lived across the street from me my whole life.

I did not want to go in the house as “HE” was in the house and my mom was not at home. She would not have helped me anyway and would have probably added to it if she was home.

I did not want my friends to see me crying and I just stood there still shaking uncontrollably, wiping the tears away with the back of my hand. My legs were throbbing and stinging. “Fuck him” I said, as I walked out down the driveway to my

friends. “YOUR DAD IS A DICK” Jo said. They all surrounded me and tried to comfort me in their own way. We all went to Mitch’s backyard to smoke a joint.

Chapter Ten

As we sat there getting high, Ellen told us about a time that her dad had beaten her with his belt so hard that it made her sick to her stomach and she was throwing up all night. She was such a tiny girl, she had a very small frame and was so skinny. It would not have taken much to do some real damage to her poor body.

I felt sorry for her because her parents were very much like mine, in their own world. Mitch was remembering how before his dad was murdered, that his dad was always hitting him. I vouched for that because I was there at his house on one of those occasions.

Mitch and his younger brother were having a fight about something and his dad came out into the front yard, and stood over his son punching him and pounding him, his little body being battered right in front of me. He had lost his temper yet again and like my parents, had chosen to use his son for a punching bag.

I understood it all too well and felt sorry for my Mitch and his brother. Those beatings did not continue for long because soon after his dad was murdered by those young punks who stabbed him to death those years before.

Jo added in that her mom had beaten her with her shoe one time for acting up and had slapped her and her sister before. Jo did not mention the abuse she and her sister took from her dad that afternoon.

Jo would only tell me about those beatings and how her grandpa had sexually molested her when she was a small girl, not once but many times when she would be at her grandparents place. We kept that between her and me. We all agreed that it was just “bullshit” and not right for our parents to be treating us like this.

I laid low for a few days, just hung around in the front yard and tried to stay out of trouble. It was definitely not looking like a good summer after all. Just more of the same old crap I had been experiencing my whole life.

Chapter Eleven

One afternoon we were all hanging out on the block. None of us had any money and we all wanted to get stoned. Mitch's friend Stewart came over to hang out with us. Mitch and Stewart had an idea. They had come up with a plan, a way to make a few bucks. They suggested that we sign up to go door to door soliciting for a charity and people would give us money. We would only turn in a few dollars and keep the rest. I did not like that idea and did not want to get in on it.

Somewhere in my heart I knew this was wrong and we should not do it, but somewhere in my recent memories of the days that had just transpired I knew that my dad whipping my legs with that cane was wrong, and he got away with it.

I knew that my mom's abuse towards me both physically and verbally and emotionally, was wrong and these two monsters had gotten away with it my whole life. Society said nothing about their behavior. I knew that all the abuse and pain my parents caused each other and my siblings and I was wrong and yet, everyone around that could have stepped in refused to get involved. They seemed to think it was okay, or just did not want to see it. So I went along with the idea.

Two days later we were out and about knocking on doors, asking for change to help this charity. We had gone out in

teams and had gone to another neighborhood, because we knew the people in our own area would have been wise to what we were up to.

We counted up at the end, and decided to turn in a small portion and keep the rest. We only made a few dollars each but it was enough to get a dime bag of pot and we all went to the park and rolled a dube and smoked it.

I sat back and thought about how I had been stealing since I was about 7 years old. Did it make me feel good?? No way, I thought. I did not want to fit the picture my parents painted of me, useless, worthless, no good, rotten whore. I did not want to be what they told me I was from as far back as I could remember, a loser. I had been caught stealing on occasion and beaten badly for it.

My mom whipped me with a belt, after I had been caught with a candy bar that I did not pay for. She grabbed me, her nails clawed my arm. She had my head in a headlock and slammed me up against the living room wall. She then dragged me to the kitchen and slammed me to the floor. "YOU WILL BE SORRY!!" she screamed at me as she reached for the belt. "I'LL MAKE YOU PAY FOR THIS!!" "YOU WILL REGRET THE DAY THAT YOU WERE EVER BORN!!!!" her voice thundered down on me. She made me pay for that candy bar.

I was sorry, and I had been regretting the day I was ever born for as long as I could remember. I was seven years old and I had been paying since I was born.

She had always maintained that she did not care what her children were out doing, as long as they did not get caught. I made it my personal challenge to never get caught after that beating. It did not always work out that way.

Chapter Twelve

Mitch and Stew went home, and Jo and I decided we were not going home. We wanted to stay out and have some more adventures. We used to talk about being mercenaries when we grew up, but we would only kill the bad guys. We thought it would be so cool to go on missions and we used to practice jumping fences, climbing eight foot concrete walls and we were getting pretty good at it.

We decided to go and scope the neighborhood for some “men at work” signs. Jo wanted to march across the street with both of us holding the signs and stop traffic. We walked and talked as it grew later and darker and we finally found a construction site with some signs. We picked up the biggest orange “Men at Work” sign we could carry and walked back to my block with it.

We would sit and wait for a car to come by and as soon as they pulled up to the stop sign, we would both march in front of the car, each of us holding a sign, and say “Left” “Left” “Left” “Right” “Left” and laugh our heads off. We were just having fun. Most of the people in the cars were laughing too, although we did have a couple who were cranky and thought we should be at home that time of night.

It was getting late, but neither of us wanted to go home. We

sat and talked about boys, life, what we wanted to do when we grew up. Jo wanted to be in a band and so did I. We would be an all girls metal band! ROCKIN'! I would be like "Lita Ford" and Jo would be like "Joan Jett" we decided. We sat there under the street light on the corner, laughing and talking. We both agreed that each of us was so cool. I really liked Jo.

She was only thirteen and a half and quite a bit younger than me, but she could see me. I mean really see me. She could see inside me and knew how much I was hurting and suffering inside. I think she stayed out late those nights just for me because she knew I did not want to go home.

"Wish you could live with us at my house" she said. "Thanks Jo, that is cool" "I wish I could too" I said. "Did your mom ever say anything about that duffle bag that you stashed for me?" she asked. "No, she hasn't yet" I said, hoping she never would. We both agreed it was a mystery.

"I wish I was pretty like you" she said. This comment took me off guard. I had never been told that in my lifetime and did not feel pretty. My hair was long and blonde. It was never cut or curled and I always wore it down. I wore no make-up as I could not afford make up and my parents did not give me an allowance or buy any for me.

My clothes consisted of a few pairs of jeans, a few shorts and a few shirts handed down to me and my most prized possession, my “freak” jacket.

I thought it was funny that she would say this to me but realized that she had a very low self esteem and was just growing up at that age. She was shorter than me but she had gold hair and green eyes. She was very pretty and I told her so. “You are pretty!” I said. “Not really”, she added. “I’m too short. “You will probably get taller” I said. “Your mom is pretty tall”. “Maybe”, she replied. “When we grow up we are going to be HOT CHICKS!” Jo said loudly, and I agreed with her.

Chapter Thirteen

The next few weeks rolled by. It was a hot summer and we all had nowhere to go, and nothing to do. None of my friends were involved in any summer programs for youths and none of our parents cared what we were doing as long as they did not have to be bothered by us.

One afternoon John showed up on the street. “HEEEYYYY!” “HOW ARE YOU?” we all asked him. “It’s all good” he said, walking up to us. “I’m staying with my dad right now and it’s cool” he replied. We were glad to see him. “Man it’s HOT” Mitch said. “Let’s all go jump in Ellen’s pool.”

Ellen’s parents had a built in pool in the backyard. It sounded like a great idea, because the whole family was gone for the day. We all ran next door to their backyard. “The pool cover is on” Mitch said, “what a drag!!” It was locked into place with a lock and John pulled a handful of M80 firecrackers out of his pocket.

“We should blow it up!” he said. “No, man!”, “that is NOT COOL!!” I said. I did not see the sense in that at all. It was their pool and they had the right to cover it if they wanted to. Mitch and John agreed that they were going to blow it up. I told them all I was going home. I left the backyard and went across the street to my house.

My mom had made brownies and I grabbed one and took a bite and swallowed it. "BOOOM!!" I heard the blast from across the street. They had blown the pool cover up. I was half laughing and half mad because that was just stupid in my eyes. I went to the front door to see them all laughing as they were running over to Mitch's house next door to Ellen's. "What was that?" my mom asked from the kitchen. "I don't know" I said. Within a few minutes the police were on the street.

Someone had reported it. They must have been seen by another neighbor. Soon after the police arrived on the street an Officer came knocking on our door. "Can you come with me" the Officer asked. "Sure" I said, walking out the front door with him across the street. "Did you see anything or hear anything like an explosion?" He asked.

I looked over to see two other Policemen questioning my friends. "We know about you guys, we call you the La Veta Juvies" he said looking at me. "I heard a loud noise but I was home eating a brownie" I said, looking at him and wondering if I was going to be involved in this if it went to court. "We know who did it" the other Officer came over to us. John was in handcuffs and being placed in the back of the police car. "We found firecrackers on him" they walked away discussing the matter.

I looked at John, he was laughing and Mitch and Jo were looking at me laughing. I did not think it was funny at all.

The police left and I went over to get the scoop. “You were a chicken shit taking off like that” Mitch said. I told him I did not think it was cool to blow up the pool cover and Mitch added that he tried to talk John out of it, but John just lit the thing and threw it in the middle of the pool cover.

“You SHOULD HAVE SEEN IT!!” Mitch laughed. “It was blasted to bits!” “John will be back in Juvie for sure, Juvenile Hall.” I added. “We won’t be seeing him for a while, that’s for sure” Jo added. She had spent some time in Juvenile Hall two years before.

I thought about John and all the trouble he was always getting himself into. He did not have to look for trouble, it followed him around.

Chapter Fourteen

I went home after hanging out with Mitch and Jo for the rest of the day, and my mom was standing in my bedroom doorway waiting for me.

“What was that all about!” she asked me sternly. Her arms folded across her chest. “Did YOU have anything to do with that!” she added. “No, I was here eating a brownie” I said in a low voice.

“I SWEAR TO GOD that if you had anything to do with that I WILL KILL YOU!!” she yelled at me, her eyes glazed over with hatred and anger. I knew I was in for it. I knew that look.

My face fell, immediately and I stood there waiting for it. “TAKE THAT LOOK OFF YOUR FACE RIGHT NOW!” she shouted. “What???” I pleaded with her. “What look??” I asked as my voice turned squeaky and I started to brace myself for what was coming. “YOU KNOW VERY WELL WHAT I AM TALKING ABOUT YOU ROTTEN INGRATE!!” she said, coming for me. “I CAN’T EVEN ASK YOU A SIMPLE QUESTION WITHOUT YOU DEFYING ME!!”

“I didn’t do anything!!!” I said to her as she grabbed my arm and twisted it, slapping me hard across the face with her free

hand. I was half bent over as she pulled my arm and twisted it down.

A backhand brought me to my knees and a kick to my legs followed. I was trying to ward off the blows but was not able to and a knee to my face sent me down to the ground. My hands went immediately to my face as I looked for blood and as I laid there she continued to punch my back and kick my side as hard as she could.

“GOD DAMN YOU TO HELL!”, “YOU NO GOOD ROTTEN PIECE OF SHIT!!!” punch, kick. I knew this routine. I had it all memorized perfectly. I was curled up as best as I could be under the circumstances. A kick to my side made me scream out loud which I am sure made her quite happy. “I DON’T KNOW WHY I DIDN’T LET YOU ROT IN YOUR DIAPERS”, kick, “I SHOULD HAVE KILLED YOU YEARS AGO!!” she screamed as she pounded my back.

I was in pain and hoped this would not last much longer. At least there would be minimal damage to my face this time, I thought to myself. “Don’t let me see another cop at this door again YOU HEAR ME??!!” she shouted as she straightened her dress and collected herself walking back to the kitchen, leaving me in a heap on the living room floor. I slowly got up off the floor and went to my room.

My mom was phoning my oldest sister to complain about me and how bad I was and how much trouble I was causing her. I closed my bedroom door and went to my dresser and looked in the mirror.

I wiped my nose, looking at the fresh wound on my face. I was angry. I was hurt. I was in pain, and what really pissed me off was that I was so used to this. This was my life as far back as I could remember.

I could hear my mom telling my sister that I was causing her to lose her mind and causing her so much grief, and how sick and tired she was of my attitude and that she was going to have to do something as she could not stand me or my behavior.

I wanted to scream, I wanted to trash my room, I wanted to run away, I wanted to die for so long. "I am not a bad kid" I thought. If I was bad it was because of the way her and my dad had been treating me from the beginning. "I should just leave, just run away" I thought as I had thought so many times after my parents beat or cursed me. "On the street, looking for a place to stay is not the answer" I thought, knowing the dangers that were out there. "Stay here and take more of their garbage, can I do it?" I asked myself.

I stayed in my room that night, not daring to go out to the living room or the kitchen. I lied down on my bed to rest my

aching body. My back and my side were killing me. I tried to relax and breath but my head was pounding. I kept half an ear open listening for my bedroom door to burst open. I fully expected my mom or dad to come charging in my room and continue kicking my ass again as they had done in the past. "Stupid bastards" I thought of how much I hated the way they had treated me and each other.

I eventually fell asleep from exhaustion not caring if they came in my room or not.

Chapter Fifteen

The next morning I woke up stiff, very sore and angry. I had slept in my clothes, so I changed my jeans and t-shirt, put my shoes on, brushed my hair and headed outside. I sat on the porch steps just trying to wake up.

Birds were chirping and the sounds of summer were in the air. Lawn mowers cutting grass somewhere in the neighborhood, the odd car drove by. I looked across the street to see if my friends were around anywhere. Not seeing any of them on the street I decided to take a long walk.

I used to do that a lot, walk across the city or run across the city, depending on my moods. I walked casually down the streets, block after block thinking about the last month and all that had been going on. Summer was nearly half over. It was the middle of July and the sun beat down in the sky. I stopped under a shady tree in the upper class neighborhood I had walked to.

The houses were so much nicer than mine. These were multi-level homes with landscaped lawns, rock gardens and fountains. I had walked over to that neighborhood many times. Lots of the kids I went to elementary school, junior high school and high school lived in this neighborhood. I looked at the two and three story homes with the double front doors, huge

ornate door knockers and handles and picture perfect lawns with bird baths and statues.

I pictured the families that lived in them and how nice their lives must be. The girls would have rooms full of beautiful furniture, mirrors, clothes, and all the things that girls should have.

Fluffy pillows on the bed and a dresser full of perfume, jewelry, cassette tapes, books, some make up and fancy brushes. I looked up at the windows on the top floors and tried to picture what it would be like to be one of those girls.

Mom would take her out to buy a new outfit and dad would ask her if she needed anything. They would talk and have fun together and go places together. They would take family vacations and the parents would hold each other and hug each other and they would go to the movies and help their kids with their homework. They would save for their education and send them to college or university.

I snapped back to reality. "Fuck it!" I thought, as I started to walk down the road heading back home.

Chapter Sixteen

I walked straight past my street and up two more blocks to see if Jo was home. Knocking on her door, her sister called her yelling, "Jo, Steph is here!" Jo came out onto her porch, and taking one look at my face became angry. "What happened? Did your mom and dad kick your ass last night??" she asked.

"Yes, my mom was pissed because she thought I was in on blowing up Ellen's pool cover" I added. "Let me finish my chores and we'll split" she said opening the door and inviting me in. I went and sat on the couch while she finished the list of cleaning chores her mom had asked her to do. When she had finished her portion we were off to the park, the next street over.

"Man, you should run away" Jo said after I explained what happened and how my mom had beaten me the night before. "Where would I go?" "I've already spent a night out in the alley because I was too afraid to go home" I added. "You can stay at my house" Jo said as we walked back to my street.

As we came around the corner we saw the commotion going on across the street from my house. Ellen's parents and Mitch's mom were arguing in their front yards. Ellen's parents were demanding that Mitch's mom pay for the damage and Mitch's mom told them she was not going to pay for something her

son did not do. They were insisting because he was with John when the pool cover was blown up. Mitch's mom was so mad. Her face beet red, beer in hand, she stomped back into her house slamming the door behind her. Even with the door shut we could hear her screaming at Mitch.

Ellen's parents would not let her come out to hang out with us. She was not allowed to speak to us or have anything to do with us. I think her parents suspected that all of us, or some of us were responsible for breaking into their home. It was getting way out of hand. I was almost glad that summer was almost over. Jo and I hung out for a while and I decided to go home that night. As soon as I got in and went to my room I could hear my parents fighting.

I hated when they were fighting. It made my nerves bad, put me on edge and I should have been used to it by now as our house had a regular fight night session.

I was usually the one to break up their fights and try to protect my mom from my dad, but after the way she had been treating me and the beating I took from her, I did not care anymore. I stayed in my room trying to tune them out.

They were both screaming at each other, and this would normally be followed by someone getting hurt. Whether it was my mom or my dad, someone would get hurt. I heard my dad

shove my mom into the living room wall and thought to myself, “this is going to get ugly if I don’t go out there and try to get them apart.”

I could hear my dad slap my mom and my mom trying to fight him off. It all had to do with the fact that my mom had stopped sleeping with my dad before I was born. She had been refusing to have sex with him for over sixteen years and he had been continually forcing her to, raping her if she would not give in to his demands. Night time was hell in my house as I had been listening to them fighting in the middle of the night for as long as I could remember.

I opened my bedroom door to see what was happening, just in time to catch my mom smashing my dad over the head with a heavy table lamp. It was ceramic and busted and shattered as she brought it down on his head.

My dad was stunned, I was waiting to see what would happen next and figured he should be out cold after a blow like that. This was not the case as my dad just kept coming for my mom.

I went out into the living room screaming at them to stop their fighting and as I approached my dad he turned at me, blood dripping down his forehead, grabbed me by my shoulders and shoved me back into the wall. I slid down the wall and was out of it for a few seconds.

That was not the first time I had been nearly knocked out by him. I just sat there, not sure if I should get up and attempt to step in or just stay where I was and try not to get hurt anymore myself.

“I SWEAR TO GOD IF YOU TOUCH ME AGAIN, I WILL KILL YOU IN YOUR SLEEP!!” my mom screamed at my dad. He backed off and went to his room. My mom went to the kitchen and slammed the kitchen door behind her. I went to my room and wondered why my parents stayed together. They certainly did not love each other and worked so hard to destroy each other. It’s all they knew.

Chapter Seventeen

The next couple of weeks were uneventful. Jo and I hung around and tormented these two girls who lived on the corner. Lisa and Karen lived with their parents on the corner about three houses over from me. Jo loved to pull pranks on people and she would go around collecting dog poop in paper bags and setting them on fire on peoples porches. We did not hang around with these girls and did not know them that well. They had only been on my block for a short time.

We had no idea where they were from or anything about them because they were never outside. Jo would terrorize them every time she saw them and I was there for back up.

After lighting the bag of dog poop on fire on their porch, Jo would ring the door bell and run. We would be hiding far enough away that they could not see us, and we would watch their dad stomp on the bag which in turn got dog poop all over their dad's shoes.

This is the type of thing that Jo liked doing, childish pranks. We thought we were so tough Jo and I. We would go around and tell people we were going to "kick so and so's butt" and of course it would get spread around the neighborhood real quick.

We would go and take bags of leaves and grass clippings and tear them open and redistribute it back onto the neighbor's lawns. We were just bored and neither of us had any money. We would go to the mall and hang out once in a while. We

stopped to look at some jewelry and Jo wanted to try on some rings.

I tried one on too and it got stuck on my finger so I put my hand in my pocket and we left the store. As soon as I showed Jo the ring, she asked me to go back to the store and get one for her too.

We went back to the store and I asked to see the rings again, tried the one on that Jo wanted and again, put my hand in my pocket and we left. Had I been caught I would have been so busted. I don't know why I did those things because I knew it was not right to steal. If we were not hanging out with Mitch and Stewart getting stoned then we were just running around the neighborhood looking for something to do.

We did not have any other interests or real "boyfriends" so we just hung around looking for ways to piss off the neighbors.

Chapter Eighteen

Summer was almost over and Jo and I came walking back to my street from the park. We were walking back to my house when we noticed a sniper in uniform on top of my next door neighbor's house. We stopped just a few houses from mine looking and wondering what was happening.

We noticed the police cars up the road and there were policemen and a SWAT team in position and it seemed to be on the corner by Lisa and Karen's house.

We ducked down behind some shrubs and within a few minutes Lisa's dad came out of the house with a gun. He was screaming and hollering and waving the gun around. Three shots rang out as he fired the gun at his car's gas tank, missing each time.

Jo and I wondered what had happened and why he would go so crazy. Where were Lisa and Karen and their mom? No shots were fired at their dad, but the police managed to talk him into putting the gun down. They cuffed him and put him in the back of the police car and took him in.

We hung out with Mitch and Stewart talking about how crazy our block was. "Yeah, and what do you think about that new family that moved into that house?" Jo said pointing to a house a few houses down from mine. "They are a little strange" I said. "I saw them all eating dinner in the living room in the nude" Mitch added, laughing. "What?" I said. "The mom and dad and

the kids were all nude?" I asked. "Yes, I was just messing around one night and thought I would spy on them and I peeked in their living room window and saw them all at the dining room table eating dinner in the nude!!" Mitch added. "What a trip!" "That is CRAZY!" Jo said.

We all talked about making it a new tradition to spy on them from then on. The three kids that lived there were hardly ever outside and they had only lived on our street for a month, we decided we would talk to them the next time they were outside and find out more about them.

I went home that night, and as I walked up the driveway to go inside I was hoping my parents would not be fighting again. I had enough drama for one day. "Is everyone crazy?" I thought to myself as I turned my stereo on and turned out the light.

Chapter Nineteen

The next day Jo came over and we went over to talk with those new kids on the block. “You ring the door bell” Jo said. “No, man!”, “I don’t want to ring the doorbell” I added. We were standing on their porch and one of the kids saw us and opened the door. “What do you want?” the girl asked. She was younger than Jo and she stood in the doorway as we asked her where her brother and sister were, and their names.

“Do you want to hang out with us?” Jo asked. “No, I can’t” she said. “We are not allowed to play with you” she added. I was peering inside the door to see if I could spot any naked family members hanging out in the living room. “Oh, that sucks” I said, looking at Jo.

I thought that was weird unless the parents had heard about us, the La Veta Juvies. Jo and I spent the rest of the day hanging out with Mitch and his friends Doug and Mike. They had Mike’s mom’s car and wanted to go cruising. We headed out to the “height’s” looking for the parties in the foothill’s of the mountains.

Lots of kids partied out there in the brush and we were looking for some pot and some fun. We cruised through the off road area, large ruts prevented Mike’s mom’s car from going further. We would have to back up and cruise the other direction. A truck full of young guys shouted at us to move “that piece of junk” as Mike was trying to steer the car and avoid becoming trapped in the ruts.

Doug and Mitch started to shout back at the guys in the other truck. "YOU faggot's" Mike yelled out his window, making the three guys in the truck even more angry.

"They are just looking for trouble" I said nervously as I could see that this was getting out of hand. "FUCK THOSE BASTARD'S" Doug said as he pulled the shotgun to the window that was lying behind our heads in the back seat. "OH SHIT" I said, laughing nervously.

"Don't do ANYTHING STUPID!" I shouted loudly. "Those guys are going to get a taste of what we got right here" Doug said as he leaned out the window and pointed the shotgun at the truck.

Mike was now driving as fast he could get the car to go, and the car was bouncing over the ruts and down embankments through the bushes and cactus. He was flooring it and the car was definitely taking a beating as it bottomed out a couple of times.

We hit some sand and spun our wheels, all the while the truck was gaining on us. They definitely had the upper hand. Mike finally turned the wheel, backed up, and then floored it in another direction and the truck did not have time to slow down and went off a low embankment.

“AWESOME!!” Mitch said. “Do you think we lost them?” Jo added, we were all freaking out and looking out the windows. It was dark and we could not see them anywhere. We split the scene not knowing what happened to that truck. I was thinking to myself what a close call that was. Too close for comfort!

Chapter Twenty

The last weeks of summer were at a close. I had managed to convince my parents that I needed to learn how to drive and my dad agreed and was teaching me how to drive when he got home from work. "It would not be long until I have my driver's license and then all we need is a car" I thought as I was walking to the bus stop.

It was the start of a new school year. Jo and I would meet at the bus stop in the morning and smoke a dube. We did not care if anyone knew we were getting high. We were the "La Veta Juvies" and all the kids either liked us or steered clear of us. We had a few "enemies" but we did not care. We were tough and we both figured we could take them on. I knew Jo could.

She was notorious for beating other kids up. I was not into fighting. I had seen enough fights between my parents to turn me off of violence, and taken enough beatings from them to last me a lifetime.

I was not beyond sticking up for my friends if I had to or protecting myself. I was used to trying to protect my mom from my dad. I was not a wimp.

Jo and I did not have any classes together because she was in the tenth grade and I was in the twelfth. Senior year in high school was going to be tough. The courses were harder and more homework was involved. I was glad to see some of my old friends from school who I had not seen all year. I was glad to

get off the block for a while and away from my house for a while.

Jo and I would meet up for lunch and go get high off of school grounds. Jo would rarely return to class, but I would not ditch with her. I did not want my parents coming down on me for any reason so I went to class.

A few weeks into the school year I got a part time job and started saving for a car. I was not even 16 years old yet, but they agreed to hire me on the grounds that I would behave myself professionally while I was at the office and not cause trouble.

Jo was bummed out because it meant less time to hang around but within a few short months I had saved enough to get a car. It also meant that for the first time in my life I had money to spend on whatever I wanted.

Jo and I immediately began to buy large quantities of pot and all we did from then on was get stoned.

Chapter Twenty One

Pulling up to Jo's driveway after work I jumped out of the car. I had bought a car earlier that week and started driving to school and got to park in the student parking lot. Things were definitely looking up.

I walked up to Jo's porch and knocked on the door. It was September but the temperatures were still nice and it was still around 90 degrees. I wanted to see if Jo wanted to go get high and cruise the city. Jo jumped in the car. She was angry. "He pisses me OFF, that dickhead!" She explained that her mom's boyfriend, the ex con, was trying to tell her what to do and treating her younger sister like crap.

"That's not cool!" I said, passing the weed to Jo. "Roll us some joints" I said. We drove around the city that night, stopped at some parks and just talked and got stoned. Things were not great at my house either.

My parents were still fighting as they had been since time began, and my mom was still calling me a "whore" and a "slut" even though she knew it was not true. Jo was also telling me about a guy she had met. His name was Tony and she thought he was so HOT! She said she had a huge crush on him and was sure that he would ask her out.

We drove to my block and parked my car. Mitch and Stew, Tony, Jo and I all sat around on the sidewalk in front of Mitch's house getting stoned. I could tell that Tony was interested in Jo.

He kept trying to think of things to ask Jo without sounding stupid. I thought that was cool.

He looked like a nice guy. “So you are the one whose parents kick your ass all the time?” Tony asked me rather bluntly. “They beat you.” He added. “Um, well, yah” I said, kind of stammering because I had never had a complete stranger ask me that particular question.

“That sucks” he said looking at me with compassion in his eyes, a look of empathy, a look I had never seen before. Mitch or Jo must have told him because I could not think of who else would tell him unless it was Jo. Maybe she had talked to him about me.

“They used to kick my ass all the time for no reason” I said. I was slightly embarrassed because I knew that Mitch and Ellen and Jo knew how my parents were treating me and had witnessed some of it firsthand. This was different, and I was not sure how to feel about having a stranger, a friend of a friend, know what my parents did to me.

“My name is Tony, it’s an honor to meet you” he held out his hand for me to shake it. I was the oldest kid in the group and a senior in High School. They were all in the tenth grade, just sophomores. All I knew is that I was not used to being treated with that kind of respect, not at home and not even from my peers.

Chapter Twenty Two

Saturday morning rolled around. I had slept in because we had been out drinking and partying all night. I rolled over, looked at my clock.

Eleven came around too quick. My head was pounding. I got up, thinking I'd have a shower and just relax for the morning. It was getting cooler as October came. I shivered coming out of the shower. I got dressed and went into the kitchen. My mom was sitting in her chair at the kitchen table. That was her place. She had been sitting there for as long as we had lived in that house.

"Hey mom" I said as I went to the sideboard to get a cup of coffee. "How are you feeling today?" I asked her. "Not good dear" she said. "Can I get you anything from the store today?" I asked. It was great having money now and a car.

My mom had never learned to drive and did not want to learn. She was from the farm and did not feel the need to learn to drive, which left her at the mercy of my dad if she needed anything from the store or if she needed to get to her doctor's appointments. Now that I could drive I would take that role on and to be honest I was glad to do it.

As much as she mistreated me my whole life, I knew firsthand how much she had suffered by staying with that man. "I don't think I need anything from the store" she added, getting back into the book she was reading. I was always happy when my

mom was in a good mood and calling me “dear”, but the sad reality was that by the time that evening rolled around her mood could have changed in any number of directions.

She was emotionally and mentally unstable. By the time evening came she could be talking about killing herself, killing my dad, or killing me, so I really tried to enjoy her peaceful moments. It did not take much of anything to push her over the edge and by tomorrow she could be calling me a “slut” or any number of bad names and punching my lights out. I learned to walk on egg shells around her and my dad.

I went into my room and turned on my stereo. I heard someone knocking on the front door. “I’ll get it” I said as I went to the door.

“Hey Jo, what’s up?” I asked her. She was angry and beet red in the face. I stepped out onto the porch and closed the front door behind me so my mom would not hear us talking.

“MY sister told me that she was over at the psycho family’s house and their dad was taking photos of them in the NUDE!” She yelled. “WHAT??” “NO WAYYY!! I said.

“YES WAY!! I am going over there and give that guy a piece of my mind!” “COMING??” she asked. “SHIT YAH!” I said, telling her to wait while I grabbed my shoes.

We walked up the front door and Jo opened it and pounded on it. Jo also began ringing the doorbell over and over to get their attention. One of the son’s came to the door and asked us what we wanted. “Where is your perverted old man!” she

shouted. I laughed because Jo really had a way with people and was often so blunt and in their face and did not mind telling people exactly what was on her mind.

The dad came to the door and told us to "get off of his property". He was a tall man and fat. He looked like a sumo wrestler to me, bald head and mustache, little beady eyes and glasses. He reminded me of one of those evil, malicious biker dudes from the movies.

He opened the screen door and started to come out. I of course backed up and off the porch and was trying to get Jo to do the same. Jo was in his face.

"YOU PERVERT! TAKING PHOTOS OF MY SISTER AND YOUR DAUGHTER WITH THEIR CLOTHES OFF!! YOU SICK BASTARD" she screamed at him. I was standing back a ways and trying to tell Jo to be careful because he looked crazy to me. I had been raised by "crazy" parents and knew that look and body posturing all too well.

He began to push Jo on the shoulder. "HOW DARE YOU ACCUSE ME OF SOMETHING LIKE THIS!!" he shouted. "YOU PUNK, GET OFF MY LAWN, GET OUT OF MY YARD BEFORE I KICK YOUR ASS!!" he threatened. "FUCK YOU!!" Jo screamed, flipping him the bird. With that, he picked her up and literally carried her to edge of his lawn and threw her onto the street.

I helped Jo up and as we were walking up the street Jo was screaming at him "YOU'LL PAY FOR THIS YOU FUCKER!!"

We went to Ellen's place to use the phone. Jo wanted to phone the place where he worked and get him fired. Jo filled me in on all the details she knew that her sister had told her. Her sister had been over there playing with the youngest daughter and in the upstairs bedroom there was camera equipment and lights set up. Not long after she started to hang around with that girl the pervert dad asked her and her daughter to take their clothes off and model in front of the camera, which they did.

"Who knows what else that asshole told them to do?" Jo said as she was dialing the number to his workplace. After her sister told her what had happened, Jo had her phone and ask the daughter to tell her where her dad worked, which she did. Jo began to explain to the people on the other end of the phone what had happened and that their employee was a pervert who took photos of his family in the nude and now her sister had been a victim. With that she hung up.

"They told me they will take action and he will be fired" she said, laughing and shouting. "YAH, THE BASTARD'S FIRED!!" we all got in on the shouting and then we all went across the street, jumped in my car and drove to the park to get high.

Chapter Twenty Three

Winter came fast, and so did my sixteenth birthday. Jo's birthday was right after mine. She was now officially fourteen years old. We both seemed to be more like twenty year olds in our minds and attitudes. We had been through too much and seen too much to be young and somewhat innocent.

It was hard to get Jo to go to school and the only way she would go is if I would force her too. I'd go sit in her driveway and honk my horn until she would come out.

She would never stay the whole day and would rarely be there after school so I could give her a ride home. She just did not do well with that kind of rigid structure. I was pretty sure she would drop out and was sure her mom would not appreciate that. We spent the winter getting high. Hanging out at different kid's places or just sitting in my car at different parks smoking joints and listening to music.

Jo and I had become very popular because I had a car and money and usually had some pot on me. Once in a while we would find some psychedelic mushrooms and take those, or some LSD. We enjoyed tripping out together and always watched out for each other.

Tony and Jo had been hanging out quite a bit as well and I kind of thought they were boyfriend, girlfriend. Jo really liked him and I think she craved the attention she was getting from

him.

He made her feel good and told her that he liked her. She wasn't getting a whole lot of attention at home because her mom was too busy working and hanging out with her boyfriend, who did not want the girls in the picture at all.

Her sister started to hang out with us and get high too. I was a little uncomfortable with it because of her age. She was too young to be getting high. She was only twelve years old, the same age I was when I started getting high. I still thought she was too young and that she deserved better. Jo and Melanie were not being physically abused as I had been but they were definitely not getting their needs met at home.

Chapter Twenty Four

The first signs of spring made me happy. I did not like being all bundled up and cold. It also meant that I was only a few months away from Graduation! I had made it. I was the only person in my family to graduate and it was a good feeling. I wasn't "stupid" after all. I thought about all those names my mom had been calling me over the years. I was going to prove them wrong.

My parents had told me for as long as I could remember how worthless I was, how bad and evil I was and how stupid and no good I was. Jo and I had been hanging out with the usual crowd as well as some new friends and "stoners".

These kids all lived in our neighborhood and because I had money and a car we were quite often partying and staying out until morning. I would then get up, go to school, go to work and then get off work and we would start again.

We were always looking for a party, some pot or other drugs, and a place to hang out. None of our parents encouraged us to do anything else. We did not know that there was a life out there other than the one that we were living, a life without drugs, a life without abuse, a life without violence, and life without drama.

Summer came and I had graduated. It was a good feeling to be done with school and I had no plans on going to college or university. My only plan was to continue to work and get high.

When I was high and sitting around with my friends, it was the only time I felt comfortable. I could forget about all the abuse I had suffered at the hands of my parents.

I could forget about all the abuse my parents had inflicted upon each other. I could forget about the fact that my parent's only concern was their own dysfunctional marriage.

I could forget about the fact that my mom's health and my dad's psychotic behavior was all they focused on. They did not care what happened to their children, and that included me. They only cared about the fact that as long as I did not "bother" them with my own life, we could all co-exist in their dysfunction. It was literally destroying me and had been since the day I was born into that family.

Jo and I continued to develop an attitude that we did not care! "FUCK THE WORLD!" was our attitude and we were proud of it. We had very little love for anyone in our hearts except our friends and each other. We were best friends and relied on each other for our only real support.

Earlier that spring Jo had been caught with Tony in bed at her house. They had been seeing each other and having sex at her house when her mom was at work. One day her mom busted her. Her mom was a sheriff and could be very mean and tough. Jo's mom threatened to kick her out of the house and Jo was forbidden to see Tony ever again.

Jo's mom's boyfriend had finally convinced her to let him move in to their house which drove a wedge even further between Jo, her sister and their mom. This man was abusive

and strong and had been pushing the girls around for a while. Now that he was living in the home, things would just get worse. Jo got a part time job and worked that summer.

We still continued to get high and party and stay out most of the time. We only went home for showers and to change our clothes. It was not long before Jo told me that she was pregnant. She knew the seriousness of this and did not know what to do. She knew that her mom would put the child up for adoption and Jo knew that she was not going to be able to look after the child.

I tried to be a support for Jo as much as I could be. Our minds were so messed up from all the drugs we had been doing over the years. Jo made an appointment and went and got an abortion. It was a very sad time in her life and the pain in her heart was very visible to me. We were close and I knew that this was going to eat at her, day by day, tearing her heart to pieces.

We continued to hang out and put ourselves in harm's way at every turn. We had very little regard for life and very little regard for safety. We were living on the edge and on the edge is where we continued to live for many years. As the next four years rolled by we were in many near fatal car accidents, had been using hard drugs and hanging around with heavy drug users.

Our best friends all lived the same lifestyle that we did and were all from broken homes, broken kids, who had lived

through hell like we had. We would never find our way out of that hell hole together.

Many of my friends died as a tragic result of the lifestyle we were living. Many of my friends went on to use crack and have since then disappeared into thin air.

Many of my friends nearly overdosed on many occasions and were not able to get off of drugs. One of our friends was murdered in a domestic violence assault by her boyfriend and another friend was stabbed to death in his driveway in a drug deal gone bad.

I can only say that I managed to climb out of that pit of hell and tried to encourage my friends to do the same.

I was unsuccessful. It is my hope that they did manage to climb out, and find a better life, the life they deserved.

About the Author:

Laurie Ann Smith is on a mission to educate the public on the signs, symptoms, statistics, intervention, reporting and prevention of child abuse, as well as assisting victims and survivors in locating resources to achieve a full recovery. She intends to lower child abuse statistics by educating the public on every aspect of child abuse through successful campaigns that provide educational materials concerning child abuse and neglect and treatment for recovery. To schedule Laurie Ann to attend your program or event contact her at:

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All proceeds from Laurie's books go to Not For Profits that work to stop and prevent child abuse.

A Note from the Author:

Laurie Ann Smith takes the reader on a journey back to the "years in between". Those teen-age years where children struggle to find themselves, to test the limits, test the boundaries and without even realizing it, find out just who they are and what they are made of.

Those "years in between" are a struggle for many teens as they search for their own place within their own families and society. Many teens find themselves and make it through without too much damage. Many teens find themselves in a whole lot of trouble.

I encourage every teen who reads this book to look for the goodness in this life. I hope that any teen who reads this book and identifies with it, and who understands the pain of what it is to be abused, to know that their friends are being abused, or are using drugs and involved with substance abuse, will reach out for help.

Keep looking for that hope and do the right thing for yourself and your friends and get help.